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BRIEF ON PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Ontario Status of Women Council

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SUMMARY: BRIEF ON PART-TIME WORK

In August 1982 the Ontario Status of Women Council undertook a study of part-time employment in order to prepare a position paper for the Commission on Part-time Employment (Labour Canada). In view of the fact that 72.3% of the work force is women the Council considered this issue one of primary importance to women. The current nature of part-time work is highly exploitative with the major problems commonly associated with it as follows: lack of inclusion in benefit structures, no union representation, concentration in female job ghettos which means low wages and little opportunity for advancement. But part-time work is much more than a women's issue.

With the major changes in work and family life which have taken place and will continue to occur in the 1980's part-time work will play a vital role in providing alternative employment solutions in the future.

After reviewing the facts and analyzing some proposals for change, the Council has made five recommendations re part-time work:

- 1) legislative changes to pro-rate benefits for part-time workers;
- 2) the inclusion of part-timers in private pension plans;
- 3) the inclusion of part-timers in collective agreements;
- 4) the implementation of permanent part-time through job-sharing;
- 5) the expansion of child care facilities.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

All women work, over 50% work for money in both full-time and part-time jobs. While so desiring equal opportunities for both part-time and full-time employment for women, this brief is devoted to a consideration of the problems associated with women and part-time employment only.

In 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended that studies be made into the feasibility of making use of part-time work in the Canadian economy. Since then interest in the issue of part-time work and its implementation as part of government policy has gathered momentum. A vast majority of research and literature on this subject has appeared within the last six years. In fact, part-time work and related issues have become quite controversial. The current high rate of unemployment has served to polarize opinions on part-time work. In addition, part-time work is likely to play an important role in the future as the labour market adjusts to the infiltration of automation and technology.

In 1980 the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council set up a commission and conducted hearings on the issue of part-time employment. They received a variety of comprehensive reports from labour, business and women's groups.¹ Many of the recommendations made at that time are still valid today and will undoubtedly be presented once again to these hearings.

1

The most helpful study for the women's perspective on part-time work is a brief by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women called Part-time Work: A Review of the Issues.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In 1980 there were 412,000 women working part-time in Ontario.¹ Approximately 23% of all women's jobs are part-time, as compared to only 6% of men's jobs.² The fact that 72.3%³ of part-time workers are women makes the issue of part-time employment one of particular interest to the Ontario Status of Women Council. For it is largely women who suffer the disadvantages of this labour situation which by its current nature is highly exploitative.

The last decade has witnessed a large expansion of the part-time labour force in Canada and this fact has stimulated a variety of research in this area. The following is a brief list of some of the problems consistently associated with part-time employment:

- lack of inclusion in benefits, ie. unemployment insurance, private pension plans, dental plans, disability insurance, etc.
- lack of unionization → only a small minority of part-time workers are covered by collective agreements. (ie. one in five collective agreements in Ontario mentions part-time workers.)
- lack of job security.
- low wages.
- work is mostly available in low skilled positions allowing limited advancement.
- lack of a definition of part-time work.

¹ Ontario Ministry of Labour, Women's Bureau, July 1982 Fact Sheet.

² Ibid.

³ Ontario Status of Women Council, Employment Strategies in the 1980's, pg. I-13.

(ii)

Council's position on part-time work is stated in briefs and Annual Reports:

"Council believes that people who work in the part-time labour force should receive equal benefits in relation to the hours worked. As a general principle, it is Council's contention that workers and their employers should contribute to pension plans regardless of hours worked."

Council also recommends that pensions be portable.

(Source: The Fourth Annual Report April 1, 1977 to March 31, 1978 and Employment Strategies in the 1980's.)

Thus the Council is on record as supporting pro-rated benefits for part-timers.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

Part-time employment can be described in a variety of ways. At the moment there is no legislative definition or guidelines describing part-time work but it is generally held that part-time work consists of less than 30 hours of work per week. Part-time work may be regular or temporary. Studies indicate that the majority of part-timers work intermittently; that is, they are "on call".

Part-time work is concentrated largely in the low-skilled sectors of the economy. The occupational distribution of female part-timers in 1980 was as follows: 28.7% clerical; 28.2% service; 15.7% sales¹ and 27.4% other. The reality of these statistics is that part-time jobs are concentrated in low-paying female ghettos. Among regular part-timers and professionals working part-time the situation is brighter, but on the whole "part-time workers are exploited as a cheap and reserve pool of labour."²

Part-time workers in the public sector fare considerably better than those in the private sector. In Ontario, for instance, government part-timers - called "unclassified employees" - are included in a benefits package giving 4% vacation pay, 4% statutory holiday, maternity leave and OHIP. However, these part-timers lack inclusion in dental plans, supplementary health and hospital insurance, disability insurance etc... and they have virutally no job security. At the moment of writing the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) is currently conducting arbitration on the issue of part-time employment.

¹ These are national figures provided by a fact sheet of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Women's Bureau, July 1982.

² CACSW, Part-time Work: A Review of the Issues, 1980, pg. 7

Their position is:

- i) to support the idea of permanent part-time.³
- ii) to support full pro-rating of all benefits.
- iii) to give job security to these part-timers and seasonal workers.

Before leaving the arena of the public sector it should be noted that the Civil Service Commission in Manitoba has recently extended all full-time benefits to part-time workers on a pro-rata basis.

The difference in status between private and public sector employees is most likely a result of unionization, or lack of it as the case may be. An analysis of the past practices of the Ontario Labour Relations Board reveals that the unionization of part-timers has been limited by splitting their negotiating position from that of the unions. The Board has consistently encouraged separate bargaining units.⁴ This only reinforces the peripheral status of part-timers. From this observation it would appear that changes need to be made in Labour Relations legislation - a provincial jurisdiction.

The relevant legislation covering all employees in Ontario (including part-timers) is the Employment Standards Act. In Ontario the greatest concern is to legislate in the area of benefits under this Act.

The area of pensions is another matter. The problem of pension reform has recently received much needed attention by both the federal and provincial governments. Part-time employees may work on a regular basis for a good many years and receive no pension for their work. In 1980 the Royal

³ This was a campaign promise made under BILD, ie. to create a new category of work - permanent part-time

⁴ Wendy Weeks, "Collective Bargaining and Part-time Work in Ontario."

Commission on the Status of Pensions in Ontario recommended that part-time employees should be included in government pension plans. What is required now is a concerted effort to implement change.

Women and Part-time Work

The most recent reviews of women in the labour market continually point out that women remain disadvantaged by low pay, segregation and discrimination. Part-time work is another manifestation of this situation.

Since World War II women's overall participation in the work force has greatly increased - from 23.2% in 1950 to 51.6% in 1981.⁵ Why has this occurred? There are basically two factors involved: the necessity to work and the desire to work. Studies show that the vast majority of women work in order to supplement their family income.

A large number of part-time female workers are married. Is it that part-time work allows them the convenience and flexibility to combine family responsibilities and work or is it that inadequate child care alternatives prevent their full-scale participation in work force? Tracing the reasons for part-time work is a difficult matter. Regardless of the reason, part-time work with its current status is not a good deal for the women involved. Yet it does have the potential to provide an excellent alternative precisely because of the accommodation it provides for other responsibilities whether they be family, further education, etc. Part-time work also offers a viable solution for the physically handicapped and for those preparing for retirement at a gradual pace. For those already retired, part-time work

offers an opportunity to keep active in the labour market and this can be beneficial to both an employer seeking knowledgeable experienced help and to the pensioner wishing to supplement his/her income.

III. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

A major problem surrounding part-time work is that the entire structure of the work place today is geared towards full-time employment. The problem is not only structural - meaning that part-time work is not an integrated part of the labour market - but it is also attitudinal. Part-timers are assumed to be secondary earners whose work is not essential; often employers and full-time workers feel that part-time workers are less loyal or hardworking. On the contrary, studies⁶ indicate that part-time workers are efficient and reliable employees. For example, Evelyn Bayefsky in Part-time Work: Policies for Woman (and Men), (Canada Woman Studies, Summer 1982, Vol. 3, No.4, pg. 81) states that

"Among the most frequently reported benefits of part-time employment were improvement of morale and reduced absenteeism, as well as increased opportunity for each employee to use special skills to advantage ..."

The Ontario Status of Women Council is in full agreement with the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women's position that the key to improving the quality of part-time work is to legitimize and regularize its position.⁷ Equity between full and part-time workers is a must. In order for part-timers to be accepted as a valid part of the labour force they must be accorded pro-rated wages and benefits.

⁶ Lorraine D. Eyde, Washington Bureau of Policies and Standards 1975.

⁷ CACSW, Part-time Work: A Review of the Issues, pg. 27

Unionization is one of the principal means an employee has to exert control over the work situation. Part-time workers require this protection and control as well. For this reason, part-timers need to be included in collective agreements.

A commitment to equity for all persons in the work force requires more than these changes. It requires a complete alteration in the present way of thinking. Rather than expand part-time as it now exists, the objective should be to introduce permanent part-time opportunities in all occupations and at every skill level. Such a change could be brought about through alternative work set-ups such as job-sharing.

Job-sharing is a work arrangement where two people split one full-time job between them. Job-sharing thus is a concrete way to create permanent part-time. The intent of this arrangement is to accomodate persons who prefer to work less than full-time.

Job-sharing should be differentiated from the similar arrangement known as work-sharing. Work-sharing is a response to economic malaise in that it attempts to combat unemployment by reducing the number of hours employees work rather than laying employees off. Workers in most cases receive 90% of their regular weekly pay by tapping the Unemployment Insurance Fund. It should be stressed that work-sharing has a different impetus than job-sharing. Work-sharing is a temporary measure designed to prevent unemployment during periods of economic lag. On the other hand, job-sharing is a positive, creative response which can offer an alternative to the low paid, low status and insecure nature of most part-time jobs.

Studies indicate that the costs of job-sharing are relatively minimal and the advantages to both employer and employee seem to outweigh any potential problems.⁸

Although the mechanics of job-sharing vary widely with the sphere of employment it has been seen to be a successful arrangement in offices, hospitals, schools and banks. The advantage of job-sharing is that it can be adapted to an individual's particular needs. Job-sharing could become a particularly important development in the future for a variety of reasons. Due to the rising number of multiple-earner families, changing values about male and female roles in the labour force, and the desire for a more flexible and gradual approach to retirement the preference for permanent part-time will undoubtedly increase. At the same time, the inevitable impact of technology will continue to displace employees thus requiring an adjustment in the labour force which could be aided by job-sharing. The Council would endorse further investigation and extension of job-sharing as a viable work alternative.

Job-sharing can be seen as an innovative way to approach major changes in work and family life which have taken place and will continue to occur in the 1980's. This changing environment also requires that accessible, affordable and quality child care be available to every working parent. In order for women to participate in an equitable labour market the Ontario Status of Women Council sees adequate child care facilities as a must for the future. At the moment in Ontario 38.3% of part-time workers are in the

⁸ A thorough analysis of the issues in work-sharing and job-sharing can be found in Sharing the Work by N. Meltz, F. Reid, and G. Swartz.

child-rearing ages, 25-44 years of age.⁹ From studies that the Council has conducted in the past¹⁰ it is clear that the current facilities and funding are inadequate and thus a generous expansion of the system is required to meet the demands of our province. Child care must be available to all citizens as an essential component of equal opportunity in the labour force.

⁹ Ontario Ministry of Labour, Women's Bureau, Fact Sheet, July 1982.

¹⁰ Employment Strategies in the 1980's; "Towards Expanding Quality Child Care in Ontario: A Plan for Action".

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, part-time work as it now stands can be exploitative. A major cooperative effort is needed between government, business and labour to achieve the objective of equity between all members of the work force. Women as part-time workers are in a very disadvantaged position and improvements must be made to ensure their independence and security for the future. Continued advances in the areas of equality of opportunity, equality of wages and access to child care must be made to ensure that the type of participation by both women and men in the work force is a matter of choice. The Ontario Status of Women Council urges that reform in the area of part-time work become an essential part of overall employment strategies for women in the 1980's. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- 1) Legislative changes be made to provide pro-rated wages and benefits to regular part-time employees.
- 2) Part-time employees be included in private and public pension plans.
- 3) Collective agreements include part-timers.
- 4) Affirmative Action Programs have as part of their mandate the study of the viability and implementation of permanent part-time and job-sharing.
- 5) The availability of and access to child care facilities be expanded.

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